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THE NEW NEIGHBOR

Ralph Rosenberger

When I was a small boy one of the most interesting things that happened in our block was the arrival of a new neighbor; and I suppose that is still true today in thousands of towns. Let a moving van pull up at the vacant house next door and right away every woman in the block is standing at the window trying to get a glimpse of the furniture that the new people have. Father wants to know what kind of a car they drive and does their lawn mower look like it's in pretty good condition.

My chief interest of course was in the boy next door. Was he a sissy, did he look tough? What were his possessions? Did he have skates, a bike or a catcher's glove?

If he had a sister, I was inclined to look upon her with a great deal of suspicion and a certain amount of hostility. As long as she minded her own business and played with her paper dolls she was OK, as girls go and I was perfectly willing to ignore her.

But then, as I say, I was very young. Now as I stand here and look over this group I wonder how the welfare departments can get such a group of nice looking girls to work for them. Now that I have a granddaughter of my own who has given me a liberal education in these matters, I have discovered that little girls with paper dolls can be a lot of fun--even though I still find that it is wise to regard their actions with a certain amount of suspicion.

So in any situation the arrival of a new neighbor is bound to excite a good deal of curiosity, some speculation, and some misgivings and since it appears that I am the "boy next door" perhaps I should tell you something about my family--The Annex for Defective Delinquents--and what we are doing in our comparatively new home, because we have only moved in since July, 1945.

This is one of those occasions where the conventional remark is also the appropriate one.

It is conventional to say that one is happy to be with a group to speak on a certain subject. Certainly, I can say sincerely that I am happy to be with you today to discuss our mutual interests.

It is also conventional to say that our organizations have much in common. This remark too, although trite, is appropriate. For the institution that is keeping and retraining the defectives from your local counties, and the welfare workers in the counties have much in common. In fact, the institutions and the county welfare workers have been bedfellows for many years.

In this respect we are not like the much-married actress who played a parlor game with a group, which included the late great humorist Robert Benchley. The object of the game was for each person to prepare his own epitaph. Turning to Benchley, she said, she just couldn't think of a thing to write. Obliging he scratched off a few words. His epitaph for her read, "At last she sleeps alone."

Ours isn't going to be that kind of a relationship. Let me inform you welfare workers that you are never going to get away from us while we are in the business. Sink or swim we are going to be hanging on to you like leeches. In fact you are stuck with us. That is one of our family traits.

I would like to tell you some more family secrets. We are known as the Annex for Defective Delinquents. We were established by law in July, 1945. Our

members have been committed as feeble-minded by the State and are considered wards or patients. We differ from other institutions in that all of these wards also are delinquent. That is, they have committed illegal acts besides being defective. In fact, some of them have been found guilty of crimes in district court. We also differ in that we usually take only a select group of defectives. Practically all of our group fall into the moron class. We have practically no defectives that fall into the imbecile group or lower. In fact many of our group have borderline or better intelligence. We feel that in most cases defective intelligence is not their most disabling social disability, but that the personality disturbances and weakness they have acquired and that have made them delinquent are their most serious difficulties.

In all cases our group can do some productive work. Most can acquire occupational skills to the degree of making a living.

Our staff feels that personality is the product of repeated choices and that a good personality is not a gift from the Gods. We feel that good personality involves definite social skills that can be acquired. This feeling puts desirable personality traits on an attainable basis and describes its elements and definite skills. We feel that perhaps the basis of our whole training program is to develop a balanced personality. Thus the real needs that characterize defective delinquents and provide the motivation for their actions are the need of affection, recognition, individuality and the feeling of adequacy that comes from successful achievement.

In order to attain these personality needs we have developed our program on an individual basis hoping to provide these necessary characteristics thru a program of occupational skills and resocialization thru the changing of concepts by counselling and mental hygiene classes.

None of these ideas is original. We have obtained most of our objectives and our program from specialists in their fields.

Ever since I received the invitation to speak some weeks ago, I have been trying to think of some really worth while service or individual idea that our staff has offered and after going over our six years of service I have come to the conclusion that the greatest and perhaps the only significant contribution that we have been able to make is this! That we have believed in what we are doing. That we believe in the defective delinquents as individual personalities. That we believe in the basic rightness of this principle.

A lawyer in the performance of his duties may be called upon to defend a man who he knows should be in jail. A doctor in fulfillment of his medical oath, may be required to prolong the life of a patient, who he knows would be better off dead. I have heard it said that even a statesman, at times, may be compelled to "rise above principle." But I know of no case in which a member of our staff is obliged to compromise his conscience, or to pursue a course which he believes to be socially, morally or economically wrong in following our principles in dealing with the defective delinquents. We feel that we are honest in our reports and that we have individually given our best although recent investigation finds our services inadequate. Such an investigation is always a challenge and with your cooperation and help we hope to meet it.

I could list our general and specific objectives for you but I feel that you will get a better picture of the Annex if I would give you a picture of a typical day.

The patients are housed in a dormitory. They get up at 6:30 in the morning and are ready to eat breakfast at 7:15. At 7:45 they attend a special mental hygiene class for one hour. At 9:00 they go to work. Those patients that have progressed to the point of earning individual work placements report to the various shops. The

rest of the group work under close supervision on a special crew. At 11:30 they have their noon meal and are back in the dormitory. At 1:00 those patients that have individual work placements again report to the shops for work and the closely supervised crew cleans up the dormitory and then have the rest of the afternoon for recreation. At 4:00 they have their evening meal and are back in the dormitory at 4:30.

Of course they are given continual counselling and their individual personality defects are pointed out to them. The dormitory supervisor works with them, the individual shop instructors work with them. They are also counselled and directed by the Chaplains, our Psychologist, the Educational Director, the Recreational Director and during their stay each one has contact with our Psychiatrist.

Following are some of the topics we have idscussed in our mental hygiene classes.

1. The need of learning to take orders.
2. The need of self effort and appreciation when helped.
3. Helping others as a means of helping ourselves.
4. How to be a good citizen.
5. Courtesy.

Each week we deal with a new topic.